

BOOK REVIEW:

J. WORTH ESTES: *Dictionary of Protopharmacology. Therapeutic Practices, 1700–1850*. Canton, MA, Science History Publication/U. S. A., 1990, pp. xvii, 229, \$49.95.

Professor Estes' *Dictionary of Protopharmacology* will be welcomed by students of medical and pharmaceutical literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, for it provides considerable information about the *materia medica*, and in the process reveals much about the medical practices of the time. Surprisingly, no similar reference work was previously available in English. There is, in German, Wolfgang Schneider's seven-volume *Lexikon zur Arzneimittelschichte* (Frankfurt, 1967–75). The *Lexikon* covers all time periods and is more comprehensive than Estes; e.g., one volume of 410 pages covers just pharmaceutical chemicals and minerals, while another of 307 pages deals with only proprietary medicines and specialties. Although Friedrich A. Flückiger and Daniel Hanbury's *Pharmacographia: A History of the Principal Drugs of Vegetable Origin* (London, 1874) and John Uri Lloyd's *Origin and History of all the Pharmacopeial Vegetable Drugs* (Cincinnati, 1921) are valuable historical recourses, their approaches are quite different.

The Dictionary begins, most appropriately, with a definition of the word *protopharmacology*. We learn that Chauncey Leake coined the term in 1875 "to encompass the study of the drugs used during all the centuries before modern academic pharmacology began to emerge . . . in 1849." Thus, the dictionary defines the composition of the drug preparations most commonly prescribed from about 1700 to 1850, except those exemplars of polypharmacy such as mithridate containing over 50 ingredients. Contemporary beliefs in the therapeutic effects of nearly every item in the *materia medica* are delineated, and, in a number of instances, the adverse effects are also described.

Some definitions (e.g., cinchona and opium) are actually informative minihistories. In fact, a great deal of historical information is included, and some attention is given to the derivation of drug names. Interestingly, names

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were derived not only from botany and zoology, but also from people, places, folklore, and others.

An important feature of the Dictionary is that it also contains definitions of terms used at that time to describe drug effects; e.g., the word *discutient* denotes a medicine that dissolves morbid matter. In many cases the modern meaning would lead one astray. Thus, an 18th century “specific” was not a medicine to cure a specific ailment, but a drug whose efficacy could not be explained by contemporary physiological concepts.

Lengthy discussions of theoretical concepts (antiphlogistics) and therapeutic modalities (bleeding, diet, electricity, and Perkins’ tractors) are included. There is also an essay on weights and volumetric measures. In addition to 46 general references, many entries contain specific references which will greatly aid scholars in need of further details.

The Dictionary concludes with an appendix of 13 pages in facsimile of what Estes terms “protopharmacological symbols” (essentially alchemical symbols) from John Woodall’s *The Surgeions Mate, or Military and Domes- itque Surgery* (London, 1639). These symbols were seldom used by 18th century physicians and apothecaries, and I question their usefulness here. Nevertheless, Estes supports their inclusion because they are found in the earlier medical and pharmaceutical literature.

The making of a dictionary involves incredible effort, and we are indebted to Professor Estes for having created what will certainly prove to be an invaluable reference tool.

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